MORTON COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT

Kyle L. Kirchmeier, Sheriff

For Immediate Release
December 3, 2016
Contact: Morton County PIO (701) 426-1587 or (701) 595-3596
Morton website: http://www.co.morton.nd.us/
Watch the press conference in its entirety: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X18HDMKnmAs

Law Enforcement seek de-escalation within protest conflict

Mandan, N.D. – Morton County Law Enforcement said today they are willing to move away from the north side of the Backwater Bridge if protestors will abide by some basic parameters to help de-escalate the conflict.

Sheriff Kyle Kirchmeier, Major General Alan Dohrmann and Cass County Sheriff Paul Laney also addressed the media regarding a phone call from US Attorney General Loretta Lynch and conversations with organizers of the Veterans Stand with Standing Rock Group (VSSR).

"While I appreciate the Attorney General taking the time to reach out to me, neither assistance for law enforcement nor a timeline for resolution was offered," Kirchmeier said. "I hope the dialogue continues, but it's time for more actions from the federal government, not more words."

Kirchmeier also stated it was time for the federal government to make a decision on the easement and to provide federal resources to assist with law enforcement efforts as protestors continue to camp unlawfully on US Corps of Engineers property.

General Dohrmann then took the podium and spoke about the conversation he, along with others, had with Welsey Clark Jr, one of the the organizers of VSSR. "We had a good discussion and walked away with a mutual commitment to maintaining peace, showing mutual respect for one another, and ensuring adequate space between law enforcement and protestors who peacefully exercise their first amendment rights," said Dohrmann.

"Both Law Enforcement and the VSSR leaders understand that there is no way to control a minority in the camp looking for confrontation, but we would continue dialogue to mitigate the action of people who don't protest in the spirit of the event," he added. "Mr. Clark did say that if the leaders of the VSSR group identified anyone getting out of line, they would remove those individuals from the protest area."

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In light of this conversation, Law Enforcement has proposed a relocation from the north side of the Backwater Bridge. "As the General said, yesterday, we had a very positive conversation on the bridge," said Laney. "The question was asked if we would consider pulling back from the Backwater Bridge, and the answer is yes! We want this to de-escalate." The sheriff said Law Enforcement would leave that area no later than 4 p.m Sunday, Dec. 4 if:

1. The protestors agree to stay in the identified protest area which is the main camp and south of the Backwater Bridge, not on it.
2. The protestors agree to stay off the bridge unless a prearranged meeting with Morton County is approved.
3. The protestors do not, at any time, attempt to remove any barriers or wires from the bridge. It is not their property and it remains there for safety reasons.
4. Protestors do not, at any time, move north of the bridge by walking, riding or flying a drone. This includes trying to flank Law Enforcement on any side.

Adhering to these requests will show good faith by the protest groups, and will reinforce their message of peaceful and prayerful gatherings. Violation of these requests will show that protestors have chosen to be aggressors by violating the law, and it will result in their arrest.

Kirchmeier reiterated that safety of all involved is still the primary goal, and Law Enforcement hopes protestors will conduct peaceful protests away from the bridge and private property.

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